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The Porn Myth: Exposing the Myth Behind the Fantasy of Pornography by Matt Fradd

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The Porn Myth: Exposing the Myth Behind the Fantasy of Pornography

by Matt Fradd

Keywords

pornography, addiction, myth, fantasy, dignity

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**BOOK REVIEW: *THE PORN MYTH: EXPOSING THE MYTH
BEHIND THE FANTASY OF PORNOGRAPHY* BY MATT FRADD
IGNATIUS PRESS, SAN FRANCISCO, MARCH 2017, 280 PAGES**

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KEYWORDS

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EVERYONE CAN AGREE that pornography, as currently delivered via the Internet, has changed human sexuality in a profound and likely permanent way. Some argue that the change is a welcome one, and that pornography is merely the projection of an increasingly 'sex-positive' culture emerging from a moralistic and Victorian repression. Pornography is an instrument of liberation, they say, and as such is more worthy of celebration than concern.

Not so according to Matt Fradd in his latest book *The Porn Myth*. Like Gail Dine's *Pornland* and Pamela Paul's *Pornified*, Fradd examines a culture increasingly obsessed with porn as a mode, and perhaps the primary mode, of sexual expression and education. His purpose in writing this book is "not to rob us of the pleasure of our sexuality but instead to insist that perhaps sex can be more pleasurable when it isn't on tap or made-to-order." Fradd identifies as a Catholic apologist and speaker, executive director of *The Porn Effect* website, and author of several books. He states, however, that the book is not based on religious mores or censorship, but rather about whether allowing fast food screen sex to become the norm is really going to enhance our sexual pleasure and deepen our human experience and journey. He reasons that "saying we need porn to avoid sexual repression is like saying that we need gluttony to avoid anorexia."

Fradd's narrative is pleasant and conversational, which carries the reader through what is undoubtedly weighty material. Consistent with the title, the chapter headings are named for the 'myths' he addresses. These myths navigate porn culture, industry, sexuality, and relationships. He examines porn from various cultural viewpoints, such as Andrea Dworkin's feminist perspective ("...even when a woman is covered in filth, we are supposed to believe that her speech is that she likes it and she wants more of it."), yet he also gives performer Sasha Grey's very opposite view ("I hunger for all modes of sexual perversity. I am determined and ready to be a commodity that fulfills everyone's fantasies"). Fradd reflects on Grey's hunger: "If someone is suffering from a sexual disorder, do we have license to turn her into a freak show? This would be like finding individuals with Prader-Willi syndrome, a genetic disease that includes the symptom of constant hunger,

and entering them into an eating contest for others to watch for entertainment.” He also balances Grey’s description with a chapter (Myth: Porn Isn’t Sex Slavery) detailing the remarkably inhuman conditions these performers experience. These descriptions are consistent with recent studies examining this issue from a public health perspective (Grudzen, Ryan, Margold, Torres & Gelberg, 2009).

He gives fair treatment to the misogyny inherent in the porn industry, and also addresses female produced and consumed porn, rape myth acceptance in men, and the debate over using the word addiction to describe compulsive sexual behavior. His treatment of the current state of the neuroscience regarding sexual addiction receives accurate and timely treatment, and the reader will be well versed in the controversies and their sources, both pro and con.

Porn’s effect on sexual performance and relationships is discussed in detail, and he issues a call to action by asking us to educate ourselves, our families, children, and society to address this growing public health concern. We are introduced to the perspectives of experienced therapists who help people who have become “prisoners of [their] own device”¹ escape.

In *The Porn Myth*, Matt Fradd argues persuasively that porn “discourages empathy,” and that a better path is to return to a culture of mutual respect between women and men. He evokes the porn view of humanity described graphically by Robert Jensen and Gail Dines: “Pornography, at its core, is a market transaction in which women’s bodies and sexuality are offered to male consumers in the interests of maximizing profit” (Dines & Jensen, 2008). Yet rather than accept the fractured patriarchy inherent in porn’s message that men are brainless troglodytes and women are merely a series of penetrable orifices, he argues, “no matter the level of consent, it is a manly thing to treat with respect even a woman who has forgotten her dignity.” This question of dignity is perhaps the central theme of this book, and leaves us with the realization that porn culture today impacts much more than our sexuality; it is our humanity that is clearly at risk.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Donald Hilton, M.D. is an adjunct associate professor of neurosurgery at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, USA, where he is the director of the spine fellowship and the director of neurosurgical training at the Methodist Hospital rotation. He is a fellow of the American College of Surgeons and of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons. His research and publishing interests have included traumatic brain injury, minimally invasive surgery, and neural mechanisms of addiction. He has authored recent peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters on addiction, including papers published in the *Journal of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, *Socioaffective Neuroscience and Psychology*, *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, and *Surgical Neurology International*, where he serves on the editorial board. He is also the lead co-author of a chapter on the neurobiology of sexual addiction in the newly published medical textbook *Neurobiology of Addiction* by Oxford University Press. He also serves on the board of directors of the Washington DC based National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE), and on the board of directors of the Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health (SASH). Dr. Hilton has spoken at numerous symposiums on pornography including Harvard, Princeton, Holy Cross, University of Virginia, Brigham

¹ Lyrics to *Hotel California*, The Eagles, 1976.

Young University, and others. Dr. Hilton spoke at the Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health (SASH) in 2012, and was the keynote speaker at the International Institute for Trauma and Addiction Professionals (IITAP) Symposium in Phoenix, Arizona in 2014, and at the Utah Coalition against Pornography meeting in Salt Lake City in 2014. He was also a keynote speaker at the 3rd annual statewide Minnesota Department of Public Health Data Symposium on Sexual Violence Prevention at the Mall of America in 2014. He recently spoke, with Dr. Gail Dines of Boston and John Carr from the UK, in the Parliament Building in Warsaw, Poland, in a hearing on the public health aspects of pornography, and in a similar forum in the US Capitol Building in a congressional briefing. He and his wife Jana have five children and five grandchildren. He enjoys reading, running, basketball, and traveling.

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